# *Mentoring in the Workplace*

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## Introduction

"Career success doesn't depend only on what you know and what you know how to do. It also depends on your ability to learn quickly the unwritten rules of the "system," the unmapped paths to rapid advancement, and the ways to handle yourself diplomatically and unemotionally during stressful or high-pressure times."

"For those touchier areas of your working life, you need someone more advanced than you to turn to. Someone to whom you can reveal your professional insecurities and inadequacies comfortably and confidently. Turning to your boss (or anyone else in your department, for that matter) for this kind of support is not always a safe or wise career move. This is where you need a mentor" (Working with Mentors)

## Mentor

When you think of mentor what exactly crosses your mind? For some they feel that a mentor is a crutch or some sort of figure is missing in their lives like a Mother or Father. In the workplace when someone is assigned a mentor they may assume a mentor to be a guaranteed promotion in their respective departments. Those are all the wrong interpretations of a mentor.

A mentor is a friend, role model, able advisor, and a person who lends support and encouragement in many different ways to one pursuing specific goals. Mentors teach you the unspoken rules of the organization: how to dress, what to say, inside information that can make or break a career. Some mentors pass on information not generally known or warn you about particular pitfalls,

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share experiences with you, and lend you support in countless ways. Mentoring is the process of helping another person reach his or her goals through coaching, counseling, guidance, sponsoring and deliverance of knowledge.

## *What is a workplace mentor?*

A workplace mentor is an individual who supports your development in the workplace and reviews your progress and achievements at work, thereby playing an important role in the achievement of your performance. Some of the things that your workplace mentor should support you by are:

- Helping you identify which performance objectives you should aim to achieve

- Setting targets in terms of performance and timescales

- Providing access to appropriate work experience and supporting your development. This may mean helping arrange job rotations, project work, or other opportunities to gain relevant experience

- Evaluating and reviewing your progress on a regular and ongoing basis

## *Skills Mentors Possess*

Communication between the mentor and the mentee is the key to a successful relationship. For the mentor, listening is a crucial part of good communication. There will be occasions when mentees will want to talk about their lives, problems and ideas. How much you listen to someone is often taken as a sign of how much you value that person. Effective listening is actively absorbing information given to you by a speaker, showing that you are listening

and interested, and providing feedback to the speakers that they have been heard and understood.

## *Three Types of Effective Listening*

### 1. Paraphrasing

To paraphrase, one simply rewords what another individual has said. For example, the speaker might say, "She was foolish to quit her job." The listener might respond, "I hear you saying that you believe she shouldn't have quit." What has occurred is paraphrasing where the listener has clarified what the speaker has said. (Coaching Successfully)

### 2. Open Questions

An open question explores a person's statement without requiring a simple yes or no answer. The basic difference between an open question and a closed question is what they provide the person being asked. When you are asked an open question it helps you think more about the issue. A closed question will not do that. It may force you to answer before you are ready, or require a "yes" or "no" answer that doesn't allow more thinking about the issue. Closed questions close the door on further thought, while open questions open the door. For example, the speaker may say, "I don't like my job." The listener might respond, "What about your job don't you like?" or, "tell me more about your feelings regarding your job." (Coaching Successfully)

### 3. Feeling Reflection

Feeling reflection is a response in which you express a feeling or emotion you have experienced in reference to a particular statement. For example, the speaker might say, "I get sick of working so much overtime!" The listener might respond, "I hear you feeling angry and resentful at being asked to work so much overtime". Feeling reflections are perhaps the most difficult active listening responses to make. Not only do you actively listen to what is being said but also you actively listen for what is being felt. When you make a feeling reflection, you are reflecting back what you hear of another's feelings. It is similar to paraphrasing; however, you repeat what you heard them feeling instead of what you heard them saying. To understand what individuals are feeling, you must listen to their words, to their tone of voice, and watch their body signals. By observing all three you can begin to guess their feelings. (Coaching Successfully)

## *Questioning*

Another important communication skill for mentors is effective questioning. Questions enable the mentor to ask for known information and encourage the mentee to offer viewpoints, judgments and justifications. Effective use of questioning is essential if one is to tease out of mentees what is going on in their minds and how they are perceiving the success or otherwise of their lessons.

There are many different types of questions that can be used during a conversation. You are likely to find all of them useful depending on what you want to establish or find out at a particular point in the mentoring session.

## *Developing Relationships*

When we are talking about developing relationships we are talking about the glue that holds everything together. When there is any kind of misunderstanding or when the mentor and mentee aren't seeing eye to eye on things it's the relationship that the two of them have established that will get them over any hump they may face. However, there are times when the match between mentor and mentee just won't work and it is important to recognize this early in the process. I will focus on those relationships that appear to be working.

There is a three-step strategy to enhance conversation and build mutual trust.

1. **Find that Common Ground:** This is your opportunity to pick your mentee's brain. You ask them specific questions about their background. You may ask "where did you grow up?" or you may ask them something pertaining to their educational background or different hobbies. Right now you're just fishing a little bit to find out what you can do to make this a smooth transition for the mentee in the workplace. There are going to be situations where the mentor and the mentee are going to be complete opposites and by you fishing early this will help you down the line when those lines of communication aren't as easy. You will be able to reference something that your mentee is interested in, that way you can transition into what you really what to talk to them about. (The Art Of Mentoring)

2. **Tell Your Story First:** "By disclosing something personal about yourself, you take the initial step toward creating trust. Disclosing information about yourself that does not put you in a highly favorable light

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is a powerful relationship-building tool." (Peddy, 46 & 58)  For example if you and your mentee attended a meeting in the morning and you slipped out a few minutes early.  You will tell the mentee "I can never stay awake in meetings anyway."  You just disclosed some personal information to create trust.  Often mentors make a mistake of asking a question and putting that person on the spot by asking some questions like "How did you like the meeting?" (The Art of Mentoring)

3. **Ask Broad, Open-Ended Questions:** By asking broad, open ended questions you give the mentee permission to speak honestly and without risk.  Ask questions like "How are things going?" that stimulates for open discussion rather than direct questions like "How do like working here?" or "What kind of problems are you having?" that makes the mentee feel vulnerable. (The Art of Mentoring)

## *Set Goals*

A mentor should always take the time out to set goals with their mentee. By setting goals the mentor has the opportunity to take note of how well the mentee is doing.  By setting goals with the mentee the mentor has the chance to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee.  Once those strengths and weakness are recognized, the mentor takes note of that and works on improving the weaknesses so that the mentee can work towards maximizing their potential.

Employees are often the best source for information about what job-specific goals will contribute to overall increased productivity, responsiveness, or other business goal.  Involving mentees in goal-setting also eliminates the potential for the resentment that can arise when goals are imposed.

| Elements Of Smart | Useful Questions |
|---|---|
| **S**pecific<br>Ensure that everyone knows the goals | What will you be doing when you have achieved the goal?<br>What do you want to do next? |
| **M**easure<br>Define standards to work towards | How will you measure the achievement of the goal?<br>What will you feel when the goal is reached? |
| **A**chievable<br>Ensure that the goal is realistic | What might hinder you as you progress toward the goal?<br>What resources can you call upon? |
| **R**elevant<br>Make sure the goal is worthwhile | What do you get out of this?<br>Have other parties involved agreed to it? |
| **T**imed<br>Agree on a time frame | When will you achieve this goal?<br>What will be your first step? |

Chart was taken "Coaching Successfully"

## Encouragement/Support

Literally, the definition of encourage in so many words means to put heart into. There comes a time where we all have needed some form of encouragement. Encouragement and support could have a great effect and a powerful impact on mentees as well as mentors. You will be surprised at how far encouragement and support can take a person in a workplace. "It has been said that one word of encouragement in the times of failure is worth more than one hour of praise or compliment after success." (innerzine.com) Mentees face some tough situations in the workplace and they tend to make mistakes on a daily

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basis, and in the midst of failure or rejection they need someone who acknowledges and accepts them by helping them keep their self-confidence.

Encouragement and support are like the other aspects of mentoring; you have to learn how to do them correctly. Everyone reacts to encouragement and support in different ways. This is why developing a very strong relationship with your mentee is very important; by developing that relationship you will be exposed to the different things that help that mentee reach their maximum potential.

I conducted a survey with a group of people from the social networking website Facebook. I asked the group what type encouragement and support do they respond to the most effectively? This was a way for me to get true information, and while doing so I was able to get some pretty diverse information.

**Responses to Survey**

- Immediate Feedback
- Compensation Time Off
- Not being Micro-managed
- Positive Reinforcement
- Sometime negative reinforcement
- A raise

## *What mentoring can do/The big picture*

The big picture, what is the big picture? Is it to help an individual reach his or her maximum potential? Is it for the mentor to be recognized for the work

that they have committed to doing?  All of those things are great but they are just a small piece of what the big picture is.

The big picture is the actual company that the mentor and the mentee work for.  "Companies are recognizing that new hires require up to six months to make a decision to stay." (Small Business Digest)  By a company assigning a mentor to a new hire or an intern they are adding so much more value to their company.  Retention for a lot of companies is low because they lack the presence of a mentoring program.

There are a lot of companies who are struggling with trying to find the solution to their retention struggles.  The reason being is that those same companies who are struggling aren't putting forth the appropriate research and time into the situation.   Employee turnover is one of the largest cost and one of the most unknown costs in a lot of organizations.  Every company reports certain wages, they report benefits, material and things of that nature, but employee turnover is no where to be found.

If managers actually took the time to look at the cost of losing an employee I think that we will definitely see a change of culture in the companies who are negligent towards the retention in their company.  "SHRM, the Society for Human Resource Management, estimated that it cost $3,500.00 to replace one $8.00 per hour employee when all costs—recruiting, interviewing, hiring, training, reduced productivity, etcetera, were considered." (SHRM)  Research shows that "it costs you 30-50% of the annual salary of entry-level employees, 150% of middle level employees, and up to 400% for specialized, high level employees!" (Ross Blake)

## *Onboarding*

"The term "onboarding" got me thinking that the process of getting new employees up to speed is remarkably similar to boarding an airplane. You, the passenger, are the new employee, and the airline is the organization. They need to get you - and everyone else - on the plane, in your seat, baggage stowed, seatbelt buckled, and ready for takeoff. Only then can the flight commence.

The airline needs to communicate a certain amount of information to you and all the other passengers to get everyone working together toward the same goal: taking off on time. In the same vein, your organization needs to communicate a certain amount of information to new employees to get everyone working together toward the same goal: meeting the organization's goals.

The airline can do this with a Public Address (PA) system, since all the passengers are in an enclosed space, in close proximity both at the gate and on the plane. In an organization, people might be spread around a building, a city, country, or the world, so a PA system isn't going to do it. Something else is needed - something that can communicate to people both as a group and individually, and be available wherever the organization does its work in the world." (Onboarding)

Another alternative that may help organizations is the creation of a Wiki within their organization. "Wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. Wiki supports hyperlinks and has a simple text syntax for creating new pages and crosslink's

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between internal pages on the fly."(Wiki) "When an organization has a wiki at the center of its operations, people can gather and share the kind of information that others need - including everything from projects, products, initiatives, strategies, and other pieces of the big picture, to the everyday: how to process an expense report, access the office WiFi network, get business cards printed, or reserve a meeting room.

On a wiki, this information can be gathered by the small efforts of many. One person might add a page to explain the process for filling out an expense report, another might attach the blank report template, and a third might add some detail to the procedure. That's a lot more efficient than a static webpage about expense reports that only directs employees to contact the accounting office and doesn't provide either instructions or the downloadable template.

Without the wiki, a new employee would have to email that office to ask how to prepare an expense report, and then wait for the file and instructions. That means an employee in the accounting office has to spend time replying to that email, and all the others asking for the same thing = inefficient."(Onboarding)

## *Conclusion*

You see that Mentoring in the Workplace can add a totally different culture to any company or respective department. It brings cohesiveness to the company, makes a new hire feel welcomed and accepted. Mentoring in the Workplace also helps keep productivity at a successful pace, know that Mentoring in the Workplace isn't only for new hires, there may be a time where a current employee is having poor performance in a certain area and they may be able to utilize some Mentoring in the Workplace to bring them up to speed. Most importantly Mentoring in the Workplace will save companies a lot of money because their retention numbers will be high, which means they aren't wasting money on the entire hiring process on an employee that stays less than 6 months. So in the words of John Crosby "mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."

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